

## Leaders Who Give More Than They Take

So when we come to this point (that followed the church's first persecution), we see incredible growth.

A small group of unqualified people with **no money, no power, and no influence** turned the world upside down and changed the course of history.

They had only two weapons in their arsenal: they were completely devoted to the message of the Gospel, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.

(And we shouldn't be surprised. That's not just there, it's here with us today. It's what happens . . . .)

**<sup>32</sup>All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.**

(I love that they were joined in "heart and mind." There have been times I was on fire, but didn't have the teaching foundation to carry me through. And there have been times my mind was there, but my heart wasn't in it. These people had both! – One in heart and mind!)

What a beautiful expression of fellowship. If you find that kind of community, you've got something special.

**<sup>33</sup>With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace (say "God's grace") was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup>that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup>and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.**

Now when you look at this, you see that there was explosive giving.

And that's what always happens when the Gospel gets hold of people: the Gospel had loosened their grip on their stuff and tightened their grip on each other.

When the Gospel gets hold of you, your hold on your stuff loosens and your hold onto other people tightens.

I've heard that some people, when it comes to generosity, are like a ROCK (for God to get anything out of them he has to hammer, and even then he only gets the chips and sparks.

Some are like a SPONGE (you can only get something out of them, but in order for God to do it, he has to squeeze them).

Some, however, are like a honeycomb. (Sweetness just drips off of them). The Gospel takes hearts of stone and turns them to honeycombs (minus the bees, of course).

Now that's these early Christians. They were cheerful givers. And it wasn't about the amount they gave – this was the poorest of churches, so poor that later on other churches take up a collection to get them through a tough time. But they just gave from their hearts to anyone who had need.

By the way – was this a case of communism?

NO – this was common-ism (and there's a huge difference).

Communism is enforced. Common-ism is voluntary.

Communism says "what's yours is mine." Common-ism says "what's mine is yours."

There's a huge difference. But this was the early church.

This is the perfect Holy Spirit led community. Explosive giving. Unity. Grace.

Then we have an example:

**<sup>36</sup> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement") . . .**

What do you know about Barnabas? He makes six appearances in Acts. He's an encourager, he pushes others forward, later he is trusted by the church to oversee the financial resources of the church.

Here, he's the lead giver.

Here's how I'd summarize Barnabas: he lays money down and picks people up. His hold on his stuff was loose, but his hold on others was tight. He's a picture of the gospel-transformed man.

Verse 37 says he **"sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet."**

He sold it – and gave the proceeds to the apostles.

And so he encouraged the church by the giving of his resources. He believed that whatever extra God had given him, he should share it. He believed he was a steward, a conduit of the blessing of God.

What do we know about him? He's serving in the priesthood, but he's from Cyprus.

**Pictures** – couple of years ago (CRETE – next island over, similar features). Beautiful place. Mitzi and I had a chance to visit there on a Bible lands tour two years ago.

This is the beautiful coastline. PIC 1

This is an ancient temple – and you see the fields, the orchards in the background -

Barnabas is from Cyprus, but not he's serving as a priest in the temple of the Lord.

Now he's a long way from home.

So he said, "I'm living here – I don't need land in Cyprus any longer. So I want to convert that into a blessing for someone who can't put food on the table.

So – he sold his field for the sake of the Gospel – and hungry mouths were fed.

So think about it this way: typically money is used to create distance and boundaries between the *haves*, and *have nots*, the needy and the comfortable. Here, money creates community. Those who have, join those who don't have. Resources are connected to need through faith.

Here's what we see- Barnabas' giving gives us a couple of insights into giving that is pleasing to the Lord:

**Couple of things – giving is first to the church:**

- **He laid the proceeds from the sell of his property at the Apostles' Feet: HE DIDN'T GIVE IT, and then TRY TO CONTROL where it went).**

Barnabas trusted the leaders to decide what to do with it.

This is what we often call a “tithe” (which was 10% of what they had).

God talks about the tithe with a promise in the scriptures:

Bring the whole **tithe** into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it (Malachi 3:10).

Another time of great revival in Israel under King Hezekiah:

The people of Israel and Judah who lived in the towns of Judah also brought a **tithe** of their herds and flocks and a **tithe** of the holy things dedicated to the Lord their God, and they piled them in heaps (2 Chronicles 31:6).

The “tithe” belongs to the Lord (the Bible says).

Why? Because the church is the primary agency of God to advance against the gates of hell.

This is the body where we do our collective ministry together and the place where we are fed spiritually.

I don’t want to be the person eats at the table every week and then skips out on the check.

I need to do my part by being generous! And that’s something every man and every woman must decide for themselves.

So – they gave first to the church.

Secondly – they gave according to need (which is the second level of giving) – v. 37.

Resources were distributed “to each as any had need” and that it happened “from time to time” – v. 34.

You’ll see that here as we put needs before you – SNAP, ice storm, someone needs a fridge. And YOU’LL SEE NEEDS yourself that you’ll want to support.

They brought the tithe into the storehouse, and they gave as needs would arise.

There was explosive generosity. This was exemplified in Barnabas!

And so if you’re a sports fan, you might remember the name Jason Brown. He was one of the best paid centers in the NFL.

Jason had a huge house with two well-stocked bars.

He called himself a believer of Jesus, but he admits money got a hold of my heart and its effect was toxic and it was destroying me and it was destroying my marriage. And he made a critical decision that he illustrated by walking into his house taking thousands of dollars of expensive liquor and poured it down a drain, and he left the NFL.

His agent said, “You are crazy.”

He said, “No, I’m not.”

And he went to North Carolina. He bought 1000 acres of land that he called First Fruits Farm. He had never farmed his life. He didn’t know a thing about farming.

So what did he do? He got on YouTube and he watched videos.

And he started First Fruits Farm, because he's going to give the first fruits of everything he grows to the poor and to promote biblical literacy.

And his very first harvest, he gave the whole thing away. Because disciples were once “born - takers.” And they become “born again, givers.”

Because when you follow Jesus, generosity in what you do, and generous is who you are.

Listen - every church needs a Barnabas story! Right?

However, every church should expect Satan to try to prevent something so powerful.

And so, there's a couple in the early church – and they saw all the attention that Barnabas was receiving, and the thought, “Let's do that too.” So – they also sold a field.

And so we come to chapter 5 – the third miracle so far in the book of Acts.

First – lame man who was healed by the beautiful gate

Second – the building shakes when they pray together

Here's the third – but not the one you ever hope to experience.

1-6

Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup>With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet.

<sup>3</sup>Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for

yourself some of the money you received for the land? <sup>4</sup>Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.” (You see – you can either be filled with the Spirit, or be filled with Satan, but you can't at the same time have both. And here, Satan filled his heart.)

<sup>5</sup>When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. <sup>6</sup>Then some young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him.

Now, back in chapter 4, Satan attacked from **without**. But now Satan attacks from within. Interestingly, this is the first post-Cross appearance of Satan. Before the cross, Satan's strategy was to kill Jesus. Now, his strategy is to destroy the church from the inside.

7-10

<sup>7</sup>About three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. <sup>8</sup>Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?”

“Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”

<sup>9</sup>Peter said to her, “How could you conspire to test the Spirit of the Lord? Listen! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”

<sup>10</sup>At that moment she fell down at his feet and died. Then the young men came in and, finding her dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband.

So here's this husband and wife – on the surface, it appeared they were doing the same thing as Barnabas – selling land, laying it as the apostles' feet. *You know, honey, we ought to do that too. We've got some land – let's sell it, get some money, and give it away.*

*BUT* (here's the kicker) – *let's tell them we gave ALL the money. I mean, Barnabas got his name in the Book of Acts, let's get our name in there too.*

It sounded so good! But – it was totally, wrong. And why?

Let me get your take. True or False.

Ananias and Sapphira were killed because they didn't give it all.

NO – they were killed because they PRETENDED to give it all.

And so the sin wasn't the money; it was the mask.

Maybe it was greed. But whatever it was, Ananias and Sapphira set out to commit a deliberate act of deception and fraud.

And it was serious with God. Why?

1. It was a sin against the Holy Spirit. They “lied” to the Holy Spirit, which means they lied to God.
2. It was a premeditated sin. How do we know? They conspired to commit it together, and that took some planning.

“Let me say something ladies – if your partner is bent on doing evil and tries to convince you to violate the clear teaching of God in Scripture, you better think that through.”

3. It was a sin against the church. They put the work of God in jeopardy.

Listen – if we lie, if we sow discord, if we stir up rumors, if we are pretenders – it's a serious matter with the Lord, and He doesn't take that lightly, because it has the power to do great damage and stop the movement of God's work dead in it's tracks. And so God is going to deal with the sin within before he moves his people from Jerusalem out in the world to sinners.

So we have a tense moment -

But think about it – churches spend thousands of dollars on security (camera systems and fire alarms and fire walls) to keep people safe. And yet the church in Acts is a place where sometimes people die. Where hypocrisy is rooted out so aggressively by the Spirit that the youth ministry was kept busy moving the bodies.

And it tells us – that God cares so much about the purity of his body, that He is willing to go to the extreme to protect it.

It was a terrible moment – and verse 11 say:

**“Great fear seized the whole church and everyone who heard about it.”**

And you see what God was doing? God was protecting the integrity of the movement by fighting for the purity of the church.

Because isn't it true – nothing leashes the church like hypocrisy?

Isn't that the number one complaint non-church people say about church people?

(Men's class Wednesday – we were talking about integrity – and someone said, “If you want to see who a man is, don't see him at church, see him at work.”

God is serious about hypocrisy, because it is so devastating. (You see these kids? The future is riding on our honesty and transparency).

And so the judgment of God in this moment wasn't random, it was protective. Before he expanded it, he purified it.

God says, “If I'm going to trust you with influence, I must first trust you with integrity.”

And so “Great fear seized the whole church . . . .”

Did you know the phrase - the “fear of the Lord” shows up over 300x times in the Bible?

In fact, Jesus makes this radical claim:

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28).**

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

This is a sober moment. God sees it all, He sees actions, but he also sees motives.

And so we have a terrible moment, and we have the fallout – but lastly (and surprisingly) – we have the EFFECT:

12-16

**<sup>12</sup>The apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>13</sup>No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. (which simply means, nobody like Ananias and Sapphira want to join the church anymore). <sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. <sup>15</sup>As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. <sup>16</sup>Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by impure spirits, and all of them were healed.**

You might expect that what happened with Ananias and Sapphira sent the church into a tailspin, but what happened was the opposite. More and more people came to put their trust in the Lord. (And they always will as we become more authentic).

Because here's the thing – 300X times in Scripture we are told to “fear the Lord.”

But here's what's encouraging – OVER 300 times we read, “don't be afraid.”

We fear God, but are not to be afraid.

And so think about it like this (from John Piper):

Suppose you were hiking the Rockies, and you just as you reach a sheer cliff with a spectacular view of miles of jagged rocks, and a terrible storm breaks in.

The wind is so strong that the fear rises in your heart that it might blow you over the cliff.

But in the midst of the storm you discover a cleft in the rock where you can hide.

Here you feel secure.

But, even though secure, the awesome might of the storm rages on, and you watch it with a kind of trembling pleasure as it surges out across the distant mountains.)

He writes:

When the storm passes, not everything called “fear” vanishes from your heart, only the life-threatening part.

The storm is passed, but there remains the trembling, the awe, the wonder, the feeling that you would never want to tangle with such a storm or take lightly such a power.

And so it is with God. The fear of God is what is left of the storm when you have a safe place to watch right in the middle of it. Hope turns fear into a trembling and peaceful wonder.

The fireside fellowship is all the sweeter when the storm is howling outside.

MUSIC

When people saw what kind of community this was, they said, “I want in.” Because there’s something about a community that takes God seriously.

The people take God seriously and reverently – but now, they are no longer afraid.

So this morning – we need to take God seriously – right?

Are you taking him seriously? Listen – you, me – we need to know – God can take us out anytime he wants to, if he sees us as a threat to those he loves. And we need to live with that realization each day.

The Bible says, “It’s a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”

We MUST take God and his Word seriously.

But I think about a cabin – the storm is raging outside, but it’s calm within.

If you OWN your sin, He’ll release you from it. (WE LAY DOWN OUR CROWNS)

If you hide your sin, you’ll be held accountable.

But we must also know that because of who our God is, we don’t have to live afraid.

God’s grace was greater than the church’s failings. Even though the early church had failure, God’s Spirit just kept on loving.

God doesn’t want you to live in fear, but trust his protection when the storm rages. (CABIN)